

IS MRS. SHELDON A FRAUD?

The Story Told by Mrs. Oliver, Who Accompanied the Explorer to Africa.

Another Version of the Expedition, in Which Mrs. Sheldon Is Severely Criticized and Her Book Denounced as a Fraud.

San Francisco Examiner.

About three years ago the news was spread throughout America and Europe that Mrs. French-Sheldon, a literary woman of Boston, intended to go on an exploring expedition alone, to the heart of Africa, and the announcement at the time caused a decided sensation in all parts of the civilized world. Some of the papers lauded the woman's determination to the skies, while others warned her against taking such a foolhardy and dangerous trip. Mrs. Sheldon went, nevertheless, and made a six months' journey into the interior of Africa. On her return she published a book, which appeared six months ago, entitled, "From Sultan to Sultan."

In this book she described in glowing language the daring trip of one woman through wild tribes of strange people, the extensive explorations that she made and the grand tour of triumph and safe return through the barbarous countries of Africa. In it were described scenes with tribes who had never seen a white woman before, and looked upon her as a god. The visit to the Masai, a warlike tribe occupying extensive territory far in the interior, was told from personal experience with them, and many other strange things of life in the dark forest, which made the book one of the most interesting accounts of travel yet published, and gave her a worldwide reputation.

Now comes Mrs. Hugh Oliver and says she accompanied Mrs. Sheldon in the famous trip, and that most of the wonderful explorations described were never made, and that the book consists of the most part of fairy tales. She also says that most of the trials and hardships of the trip were endured by herself and not by Mrs. Sheldon. As she at length tells the story, it is a complete description of the famous trip, which entirely differs from Mrs. Sheldon's in many important particulars, and also gives a view of the private life and character of the authoress which is anything but charming.

Mrs. Oliver arrived here from England three weeks ago, and is now living in Sonoma county, where she was seen by an Examiner representative, and gave her version of the journey. She is a pretty little English woman of medium size, and hardly looks strong enough to have endured the terrible experience she went through with Mrs. Sheldon. As she sat beneath the vine-covered veranda of Captain Boye's cottage at Verona last Wednesday, one could hardly believe she had traveled a thousand miles through the African jungle, for, although not frail, she appears anything but a strong woman, and one that could undergo severe hardships. At first she did not feel inclined to tell the story, but, being importuned, finally consented.

"If you must hear it I must go back a year or more and tell how I came to go with Mrs. Sheldon, and also a part of my life. My first husband's name was Captain Rigg, a man well known in shipping circles in San Francisco, whence he sailed for Liverpool for many years. Four years ago I was with him at Colon, when he suddenly took sick with fever and died within twenty-four hours. He was not a saving man, and his death left my little boy and myself in straitened circumstances. We went to New York and did not find things there any better, and started to England to visit my relatives.

"On the trip over I first met Mrs. Sheldon. She was suffering from a wound in the thigh, caused by a brooch pin, and I offered to nurse her. The offer was accepted, and I took care of her until we reached England. Her husband was waiting her arrival there, and I was invited to accompany them home. Preparations were at once begun for the African trip, and, as Mr. Sheldon did not wish her to go alone, he asked me if I would accompany her. Not knowing what else to do, and, as I had traveled a great deal with my husband, and did not fear danger, I accepted. An agreement was made for six months, for which I was to be paid \$100.

"We left England in March and went overland to Naples, where we took the steamer for Suez and Zanzibar. At Zanzibar Mrs. Sheldon, having letters to the Sultan, secured an audience and presented him of her desires. He was very friendly and ordered a caravan to be got ready. When arrangements were completed we left Zanzibar in a dhow for Mombasa, up the coast, and from there started on our long journey.

"I had a pretty good idea of Mrs. Sheldon's character, as far as truth was concerned, by this time, as she had told the most wonderful tales on board the ship about her splendid jewels, magnificent household and equine in England, which I knew she did not possess, as I stopped at the house while in London and in it to be only a rented one, but what I experienced on the trip showed me that I did not half know her. I have never told these things before, except to my husband, and probably never would had not you asked me.

"We had two hundred men in our caravan and one interpreter and guide. We left Mombasa on the 25th of April, 1891, and soon got into the heart of the forest; then the hardships began. Mrs. Sheldon and I led the procession, but after the first day she said she had taken a violent dislike to me, and told me to go to the rear end. I was so surprised I did not know what to make of it at first, but found before the journey was over that it was a beginning of what I was to suffer before we got back. She rode in a palanquin in front and I was carried in a hammock, but after the first month's travel she inclined to a hammock away from me and I had to walk.

"The path was a very narrow one cut through dense forests, with hardly enough room for two people to pass. On each side was a thick wall of thorns and vines, which, if one chanced to graze against them, rent the clothing and drew blood. In fact, everything I ate was well seasoned with ants, cockroaches and other small game. The insects were something awful, and there was no getting rid of them except to rub a little liniment on the face and hands, which partially protected them. They could not enter my costume, as it was made extremely for the kind of travel. It consisted of a pair of trousers to the knees, and a blouse and kilt, which reached just below. The lower limbs were protected by a pair of leggings and a heavy pair of laced walking shoes.

"Our journey was monotonous in the extreme, so far as scenery goes, it being the same thing over and over again every day. At night, though, we could hear the lions roaring away out in the forest, and sometimes they approached very near, but we never saw one, although I believe Mrs. Sheldon sent the skin of one to England, which she claimed to have shot, but which she really bought at one of the coast towns on our return.

"The only dangerous animals we saw were hippopotami, hyenas and rhinoceros, which were common along the route.

"Mrs. Sheldon acted so queerly at times that I began to think she was crazy or had something the matter with her. She would send for me and when I appeared before her drive me away, and at other times be very sweet and pleasant. Then she forbade my taking any trinkets or presents from the chiefs of the villages we passed through, and would not allow me to see them until they demanded that I be brought forward. She seemed to want them to think she was the only one in the party. The interpreter was always told to announce her as a greater woman than Queen Victoria, and that she had more jewels and wealth than anybody in the world.

"The magnificent dress and the jeweled sword, which she speaks of in her book as used to awe the different chiefs, never existed. She did change her dress before entering a village, but the one she put on wasn't worth \$2. It was made of a light material, decked out with fancy ribbons and sham trinkets. She never made much of an impression on the chiefs, and the men in our caravan hated her, and would have all run away the first two weeks if they had not feared the wrath of the Sultan. She used to have them whipped on the slightest provocation, and always made them salute her when she passed.

"Mrs. Sheldon's journey was reached a watering place and the tired bearers threw down their burdens, and, as is the custom, fell beside them on the grass to rest. I also laid down with them. While we were lying there Mrs. Sheldon came by and ordered all to get up and salute her, myself included. I thought she was joking, but she drew her pistol and threatened to kill me if I did not comply with her command. This is only a sample.

"At all the villages we were well received, as a rule, having plenty of presents to give the chiefs. At one place we came to a chief named Mariala, who said he wished to buy me, and offered a large number of cows and goats in exchange. He already had fourteen wives, and sent them to call upon me while negotiations were pending. I had my leggings off at the time, exposing a pair of black stockings, and they thought I was dark black and part white. I had to pull down my stockings and show them my white skin before they would believe different. Meanwhile, Mariala's offer for me was refused, and he saw us depart with many regrets, much to my satisfaction.

"When the journey was half over I was stricken with fever, and then my troubles began. It lasted several weeks, and Mrs. Sheldon never came near me during that time. As she had taken my hammock I had to be carried astride a man's shoulders. I begged her to let me have the hammock, but she refused, and to make matters worse, took my little tent away to present to a chief who admired it, and made me sleep under one made of cotton. Of course, the rain and sun came through this, and often I slept on the ground outside, preferring that to the heated place within. She even took away a bottle of brandy I had brought along in case of sickness, and gave it to one of the village chiefs. How I recovered, God only knows; it seems now like a miracle.

"While I was sick we stopped sometimes at a village several days, and the women and men would lie flat on their stomachs all day long in front of my tent door and look at me. It was only done out of curiosity, but it used to make me terribly nervous. They would reach in at times and touch my skin in wonderment, and then chatter among themselves, and between them and the fever I thought I should die.

"We had one man with our caravan named Livingston. He had been with the great explorer and took his name, and always spoke of him in endearing tones. This black was very kind to me, and did me many favors through my sickness. He always said I was a god, or else I wouldn't be white. The little favors always had to be done surreptitiously, for if Mrs. Sheldon caught him he would be whipped. It seemed as if she wanted me to die, and I believe she would not have been sorry if I had. I could not see any motive then, but do now. It was the book she had in contemplation, and she was afraid I would tell the true story.

"The last people we visited were the Moshi, about five hundred miles from the coast. Their chief, Mandari, also wished to add me to his harem, like Mariala, and offered a large quantity of ivory in payment. He became very angry when refused, and trouble was expected. One night our head man said Mandari intended to kidnap me, so Mrs. Sheldon ordered two men to guard me. The interpreter said that was not enough, but she refused to allow any more. During the night, however, the head man stationed twenty armed men around my tent unknown to her, and the attempt was nipped in the bud. We were afraid to stay there any longer on account of this, and left the next day.

"Mrs. Sheldon in her book tells of a visit to Masai land and her experience with the women there. This is an absolute lie. She never went near Masai land. It was our intention to go there, but word was sent us that fighting was going on, and it would be very dangerous. Our head man went to the Masai and asked if we could pay them a visit, and brought word back that we would be killed if we did. The furthest point we reached was the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, which is on this side of the coast, and between them and the Moshi.

"The journey back was one of terrible hardship. We never had enough provisions at any time, and for days we had to eat except sugar cane. At the villages we could get Indian corn and yams, but the latter would soon spoil. It was very hard on me. Mrs. Sheldon would not let me come near her sometimes for weeks, and I had no one to talk to except the blacks, and that was mostly by signs.

"Finally Mrs. Sheldon took the fever and was sick for many weeks. She wanted me then and I had to nurse her through the sickness at all times of night and day. At the end of it she was terribly emaciated and made me take her photograph naked so that she could show her friends what terrible privations she had gone through. I made lots of other photographs while on the journey, but she took them all away from me, so that I have nothing to show except a few trinkets and other curiosities that I picked up and brought away without her knowledge.

"About the most amusing thing in her book is her explorations on Lake Tanganyika, about which she lectured on her return to England and before the Geographical Society of Cardiff. I will give you a description of the explorations. We arrived at the lake in the afternoon and went into camp. After eating a canoe was procured, and Mrs. Sheldon and two blacks went out. They paddled around for half an hour, in plain sight of the camp, and then returned to the shore. If she saw any hippopotami she is the only one that did. We immediately left when she got on shore, and that was the exploring she ever did. Where she got her notes from to give the lecture I don't know, but it wasn't from personal observations.

"Our trip down to the coast was wearisome, but we finally arrived at Pangani all safe, and took a dhow from Zanzibar, and dismissed the caravan. On the trip back to England Mrs. Sheldon would not speak to me, although after I arrived there I remained at her house nearly a week. She told some awful lies about our journey to the people on the steamer when coming home, but always took good care that I should not be present. She had already announced her coming by telegraph, and sent articles to the papers, prepared herself for a royal reception, and told me on the train that the queen would probably send some one to meet her. When we arrived no one except her husband was there, and she flew into a terrible rage.

"We got back within three weeks of six months, and as a fitting ending to the way she had treated me three weeks' pay was deducted from my \$100, although she had agreed to give me the full amount. I do not know why she treated me in the way she did, except that she wished the public to believe that she had made the trip alone. One thing I do know, however, and that is that her book is a pack of lies. I have not seen it yet—only extracts which I have mentioned here—but if her book is like her explorations of Lake Tanganyika you take your choice from that."

Mrs. Rigg, after her return to England, married Captain Hugh Oliver, whom she met on the way to Africa and became engaged to six months ago. Thus with her boy, makes up the family, and they intend to buy a ranch at Verona and make California their home.

Mrs. Oliver tells her story in a straightforward manner and has her notes to bear out every statement.

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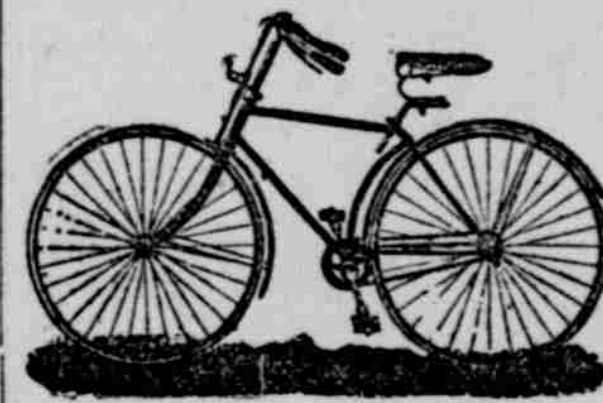
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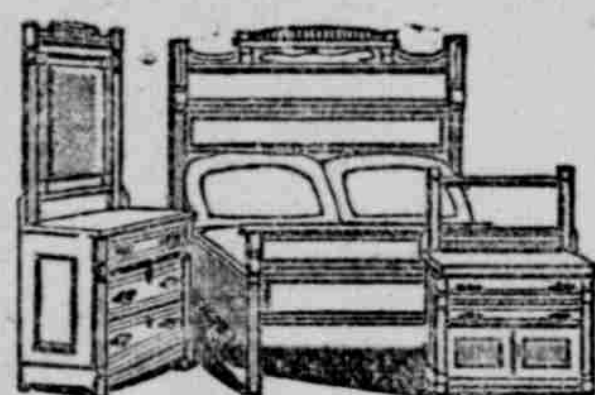
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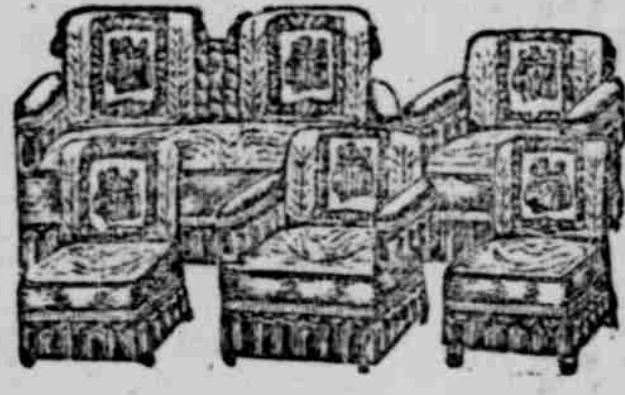


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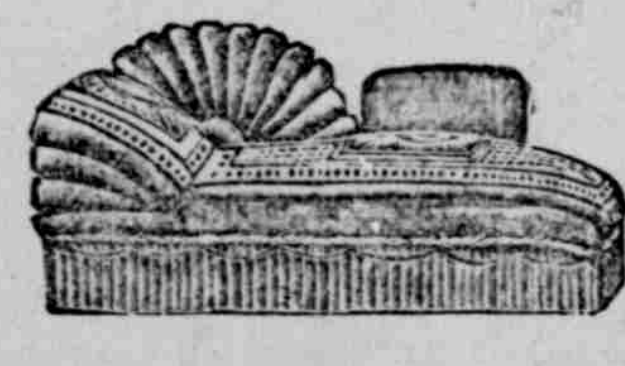
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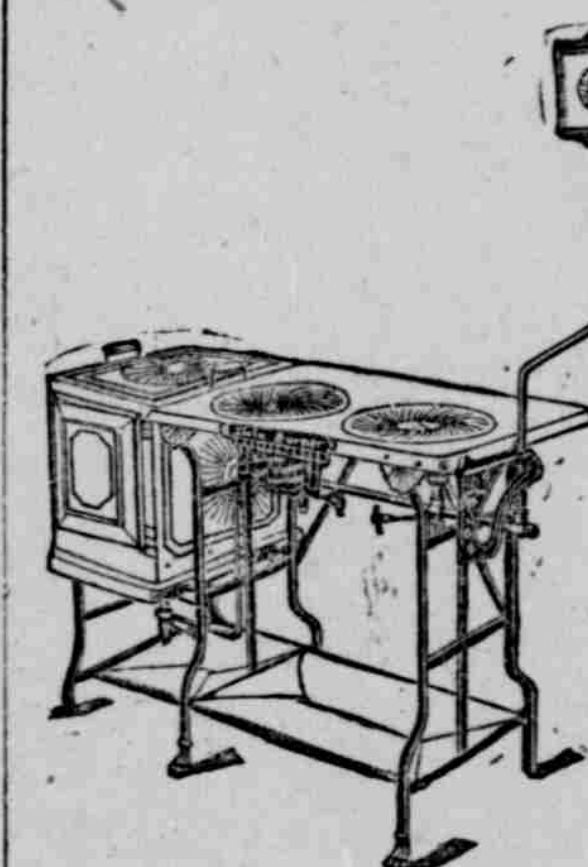
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